

Board members want meaningful work.

One 32-year-old who sits on two boards recently said, “I like it when I get a call from a chief executive asking my advice or asking me to have lunch with someone who wants to know more about the organization. And I like it when the leader clearly communicates our goals and shows me how I can help us get there.”

Board members, especially those in their 30’s and 40’s, want to be more hands-on, not in the sense of running the operation but in meeting those people served by the organization. Meeting the people and seeing the operation in action builds trust and deepens their commitment.

A recent article in the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* says,

The relationship between nonprofit executives and their board members is evolving: Newer, younger board members tend to value direct participation and palpable, meaningful results that justify their commitment to an organization. Charities that recognize what trustees want from their board service will build stronger relationships with them—and be better equipped to weather current economic storms, say experts.

They suggest:

- **Challenging the Board** – Involve the board in the struggle as big decisions take shape. They want less time in formal meetings and more time working out the details. Also keep the board informed on what’s happening in the community and how the organization is strategically part of something bigger than itself.
- **Meaningful Meetings** – Restructure your full board meetings to provide more interaction for members. Bundle routine items (e.g., approval of minutes and regular reports) for quick action and allow time for deeper discussion on the more challenging issues.
- **Constructive Tension** – Place the majority of the work in strong, focused committees where the hard issues can be dissected. Require members to come prepared for discussion and encourage challenging questions. Remember, lively discussion usually means you’re on an important issue. Make sure reports to the board are given by the committee chairperson (not staff) which puts them in the spotlight and deepens their commitment.

For further assistance, both [ONEplace@kpl](#) and [Volunteer Kalamazoo](#) offer training opportunities for board members.